

Andrew Swick
Aviation Accident Investigator
NTSB AS-WPR

Date: October 10, 2020

Subject: WPR21LA003, Hawthorne Police Department-Incident Report,
Excerpt of Witness Statements

Contact: Timothy Weeks, Reporting Officer, Hawthorne Police Department

The following text contains witness statements, was extracted from the Hawthorne Police Department's Incident Report for clarity:

While LACOFD worked the scene, I contacted witness Dion Reed (Employee: Jet Center FBO, Phone: [REDACTED]) who told me the following in essence:

Dion was driving his vehicle eastbound on 120 Street near the 3300 block when he observed an aircraft take-off from the Hawthorne airport and "Just turn" (Dion made a sweeping motion to the right with his arm, indicating the aircraft made a large right turn). Dion estimated the aircraft's height to be approximately 500 feet in the air at the time he observed the craft airborne.

Next I contacted witness Thomas Myers (Phone: [REDACTED]) who advised me of the following in essence:

Thomas was pre-flighting a Gyro-Copter near Hanger 124 at the Hawthorne Airport as "Joe" (Joseph Audette) took off. Thomas stated Joseph gained altitude to approximately 30-40 feet before banking right. Thomas observed Joseph clear the Hawthorne airport fence-line (North side of the airport) and continue banking right until he lost sight of the aircraft. Thomas and Henry Bodger (Owner, Pacific Blue Air) got into a vehicle and responded to the crash site. Thomas did not see or hear the aircraft crash.

While I conducted my interviews, Officer Valadez (410) conducted an interview of witness Walter Rosales (Phone: [REDACTED]). Walter advised Officer Valadez of the following in essence (It should be noted that Officer Valadez later advised me of Walter's statement verbally):

Walter stated he watched Joseph take off from the Hawthorne airport heading in a westward direction away from the airport. Walter watched as Joseph's aircraft lifted off of the runway and then veered toward a tree (NFI/NFD). Walter stated he watched as the aircraft crashed.

A short time later, Guido Fernandez (Airport Supervisor – Hawthorne airport, Phone: [REDACTED]) arrived on scene and advised me that he had spoken with Henry Bodger and was informed by him that the crash may have occurred due to Joseph overcompensating for a right turn directly after take-off. Guido advised Henry would be sending him an email narrating what he observed. I asked Guido if the airport had any video surveillance that would show the flight of Joseph's craft and/or the crash itself. Guido advised there may be footage available and advised he would review the airport's cameras and contact officer Cardenas or I to send any pertinent video. At the time of the writing of this report, no video has been received from Guido.

Upon our arrival Officer Cardenas and I began taking statements from everyone inside the hanger separately. I soon contacted Henry Bodger (Owner, Pacific Blue Air – Hanger 124). It should be noted, prior to my interview with Henry in Hanger 124 I had briefly contacted him when officers initially responded to the crash site. At that time, Henry had confirmed to me the pilot of the craft's name was Joseph Audette. Henry also advised at that time that Joseph owned the craft involved in the crash (Yellow Lightweight Trike Glider, Make: Evolution Aircraft, Model: Revo, Tail #: N449WB, Serial: 000614) and that Joseph stored the craft inside Henry's hanger (Hanger 124, Hawthorne airport).

Henry stated he had Joseph's cell phone in his possession. It was decided we would take the cell phone for safekeeping and give the phone to the Coroner upon their arrival to the crash site. Henry then advised me of the following in essence:

Henry was with Joseph this morning before Joseph's flight. Henry advised Joseph was acting normal, did not appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and showed no signs of any health issues.

Henry advised me that he watched Joseph take off, at which time Joseph's aircraft began banking to the right. Henry advised Joseph pushed the steering to the right and banked harder to the right before flying into the drainage ditch. I asked Henry to clarify where he observed Joseph's aircraft enter the drainage ditch and he advised me the aircraft flew between a large tree and a medium sized palm tree planted next to each other on the north side of 120 street. Henry advised the aircraft's height was just below the large tree.

It should be noted the area Henry pointed my direction to was the same area where Officer Cardenas and I had noted the outer fence line of the drainage ditch had been broken and bent (See photos for fence-line and Henry's viewpoint from Hanger 124).

I asked Henry if it appeared that Joseph steered the aircraft through the trees and into the ditch and Henry advised that from his angle, it did appear to him that Joseph steered the craft in that direction. Henry offered the opinion that Joseph may have made mistakes in the steering of the aircraft and possibly made a panicked decision, compounding the issue of Joseph's initial hard right bank.

I confirmed with Henry that aircraft do not typically make a right bank upon take off from Hawthorne airport and he confirmed that to be the case, stating aircraft from Hawthorne airport

always make a left bank upon take-off. Henry also referenced LAX airport's location to the right (North) of the airport as a main reason aircraft do not make a right bank upon take off.

I asked Henry if he was able to hear the engine from Joseph's aircraft upon take off and Henry advised me the aircraft's engine was running the entire time it was in flight and that he heard no anomalies or the engine cutting off. Henry also stated the propeller for the aircraft was turning for the duration of its flight.

I asked Henry if he had the aircraft and engine logs for the aircraft involved in the incident and he was able to retrieve them for me (See photos). I confirmed the logs matched the tail number for the involved aircraft (N449WB) and kept both logs for safekeeping. Both logs would eventually be handed over to Coroner Munoz upon her departure from the crash site.

Henry advised he did not have access to Joseph's pilot flight logs at the Hanger and advised me Joseph likely kept those logs filed personally. It should be noted that upon inspection of Joseph's vehicle (Parked near Hanger 124) Officer Cardenas observed a tan folder inside the vehicle containing unknown paper documents inside. Henry provided us with Joseph's pilot license number (#: [REDACTED], issued 07/2017).

Per Henry, Joseph's flight this morning was the first flight for the aircraft today. Henry advised the last time the aircraft was flown was 10/2/20 at approximately 1200 hours (Piloted by Henry with passenger Wilfred Manzanares). Henry advised that he noticed no issues with the aircraft during his flight on 10/2/20.

For clarity, I asked Henry how the aircraft is steered and he advised me its steering is much like a hang-glider, in that, to turn the aircraft hard right the pilot has to hold the horizontal steering bar and push the bar away from their center mass and out to the left. The further out a pilot pushes, the harder the turn.

I then asked Henry if anything like today had ever happened before with Joseph and Henry advised a couple of years ago, Joseph took off from the Hawthorne runway and steered to the right and directly at the tower. Joseph was able to correct his flight path to the left and avoided the tower. Henry advised that when he asked Joseph what happened upon take off, Joseph told Henry he had a "Brain-fart". Henry was not aware of any medical issues for Joseph, stating he was pretty healthy.

End of excerpt.